

Notes & Queries

SCATOLOGICAL LORE ON CAMPUS:—While in recent years sporadic articles have dealt with college folklore, because of taboo comparatively little work has been done with scatological folklore on the campus. This lore is much like any other, for it is assuredly transmitted orally and rarely if ever sees print. Though investigation is difficult, it is apparent that much scatological college lore is fairly widespread both geographically and in time.

An interesting and perfectly understandable phenomenon occurring with scatological college lore is that in time, at any one college, many of the most popular stories become associated with one particular student figure, who may or may not even have attended the school. This character seems to have attributed to him many of the scatological stories common at the time, stories that are also told at other colleges, and that were told in years gone by. Of course, the exact same sort of story adhesion happens with any legendary hero, as we all know. Outside of college, a raft of obscene folklore has been reported of Albert Pike, the writer and legalist. Various heroes of antiquity, such as Julius Caesar, also have obviously folkloristic scatological stories associated with them. So it should be no surprise that we find local sex heroes cropping up from time to time on our campuses.

At one college, the following stories have all become associated with a certain local campus character, whom we shall call *X*. *X* supposedly graduated several years ago, and according to the students was known up and down the seaboard for his foulness. Referred to by the students with proud revulsion, *X*'s name varies slightly from version to version, but always retains a recognizable core. The stories attributed to him have all been reported from two to five times at other universities, schools sometimes several thousand miles apart, and attributed to other local characters. Most of the stories told to indicate *X*'s extreme foulness involve some form of genital exhibitionism. Occasionally a more innocent story about *X* is told, such as his drinking whisky sours out of a urinal specimen bottle while standing in front of his fraternity house; but the majority of the stories, however, are more disreputable. Some, but strangely not many, involve *X* and some coed or other. The coed is always different.

X would stretch out on a couch in his fraternity house on Sunday morning after some especially big Saturday night party. He would expose his penis and then place the Sunday paper over it. When his fraternity brothers and their dates arrived for breakfast, some girl (never a brother) would rush over, thinking *X* asleep, and grab the paper.

For what it is worth, possibly the most widespread scatological college story is that in which *X* takes a coed to the moving pictures. Midway through the performance he empties a popcorn box and places his penis in it. He then offers his date some popcorn, she nods yes, and reaches for the box. This one story, tacked on to *X*'s career, has been reported at five universities, and as occurring up to over a decade ago.

But the strangest manifestation of *X*'s legendary history—what he is best known and celebrated for, demonstrating something reported at other colleges as well—is what the students call the gross contest. These are more or less scatological parodies of epic battles, in which the contestants strive to see which is the most gross, the most foul. They too invariably hinge upon some form of genital exhibitionism. In *X*'s history, the contest is always between *X* and some representative from one specific neighboring college. The

locale of the contest, and the adversary's name, may change. But always *X* and always a student from the other university battle to see which is the more gross. Students of *X*'s college are properly revolted by their hero's antics, but never fail to have him triumph.

Three of the gross contests should suffice to show their pattern. At one party weekend, *X* is challenged by the opposing university's representative to a contest testing his grossness. The challenger jumps up on a table and calls out to the observing coeds and their dates all of the filthiest words he can conjure up. He then jumps down and in a superior manner asks *X* if he can possibly top that. *X* strides to the table (this is the way the story is told), leaps up on it, and asks for a bourbon and water, unmixed. He is handed the drink, and to the disgust of all, stirs it with his penis. He then quickly swallows the mixture. This wins the contest.

Another time *X* is at a resort between semesters, sitting on a boardwalk bench. He is again challenged to a gross contest by a member of the opposing university. The opposition walks out to the middle of the boardwalk and takes off his swimming trunks. *X* walks away from him, and everyone thinks he is admitting defeat. Some time later there is a disturbance at the upper end of the boardwalk. The crowd learns that *X* has just walked into a crowded restaurant, placed his penis on the counter, and has ordered a chocolate ice-cream cone.

Finally, at the rival university, *X* is again challenged. His antagonist (who always performs first) walks to the busiest intersection in town and urinates in the middle of the street. Everyone thinks *X* is dethroned at last. But he walks into a busy restaurant, and seeing two old ladies drinking soup, goes over to them, and urinates in their soup bowls. The stories always end with *X* victorious. Never is there any hint of private or official recrimination.

The basis for these stories, obviously, involves extreme disregard for social behavior, to say the least. I suspect that the stories are the surface appearance of some deeply-rooted antagonism between the individual and the restrictions placed upon him by various authorities, both personal and social, to act properly and in what we call a civilized manner. They are of nightmarish intensity in their antisocial attack, the sort of frightening dreamworld story some experience when somehow for the moment our polite conscious self drops its guard. Told, as far as I can discover, only by men, they strangely do not involve women to any large degree, and seem unrelated to latent heterosexual drives. When coeds are mentioned, the idea of exhibition is still uppermost, so no fertility or masculinity ritual seems involved. In none of the gross tales or contests that I have heard is there any idea of normal heterosexual gratification, no supernatural sexual feats.

I suspect that these tales, in some form or another, are extremely long-lived. Information on the topic is scarce, but it seems plausible that today's college students—or today's youth, for that matter—are not far different from their elders. To widen the context of the study, it also seems plausible that the mind capable of creating the cleanly heroic, socially sanctionable brags of, say a *Beowulf*, is also capable of creation in a more anti-social direction. Or to place the idea in still another historic context, the riverboatmen who gloried in their ugliness, their strength, their animal ferocity, also probably gloried in their foulness. Only it is difficult to support such claims, for the gross story is obviously one that polite society does not sanction and would not openly report.

The deeper psychological investigations of such gross stories I leave to those more qualified to evaluate. It is indeed unfortunate, however, that in a day when so much study is directed to the psychology of the abnormal, the darker side of normal man's psyche must here be ignored as a field of broad investigation. While it is not certain that every study must bear practical results to justify itself, it is clear that in this particular instance, a more formal, easily distributed study might reveal much about the subculture of the college group, and possibly about the sex culture of men at large, who, I am sure, also know and tell variants of the few gross stories I have given.

But I caution the unwary collector of such information. The facts, other than those one knows from one's own college days, are not easy to come by. Clearly the college students themselves can only be used under very strictly controlled conditions. College authorities are loath to permit studies of this nature, and students being what they are, the scholar-in-residence can be hindered in investigating more than is usual. The college student may feel no surprise at all being questioned about those old stories his grandfather used to tell by the fireplace, but he may become suspicious of the folklorist who attempts to plumb beneath his gentlemanly facade. Generally, graduate students, who have both the necessary information and the properly serious attitude toward such information (or will have with instruction) are the most helpful.

But whatever the source of information, if collected on a relatively wide scale, and properly collated and examined, I am sure that further study of scatological college lore, with its unguarded exuberance, its view beneath the official veneer, would reveal much about the netherworld of the normal mind that exists in all of us, whether we realize it or not. And this dark area surely has existed as long as man's recordable, civilized, sanctionable thoughts. We may prefer to think of Beowulf against Breca or Grendel, or Jack against the giant, but who really thinks that tales of man's grossness, of his foul rebellion against organized, polite society, exist only on today's campuses?

Name Withheld by Request

PARODY AND NICKNAMES AMONG AMERICAN YOUTH:—Looking through the fine work by Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (Oxford, 1959; collected between 1951 and 1959), this author was struck by several parallels which date from his own school years. They are here offered as of possible interest to collectors.

In chapter 6 ("Parody and Impropriety"), the authors give an example of the burlesque sermon in verse: "Dearly beloved brethren,/The Scripture moveth us in sundry places" (p. 87). The following is a poem which I learned at approximately age 12 in 1934, from a family friend.

Dearly beloved, is it not a sin
To eat Irish potatoes, and throw away the skin?
For the skins feed the pigs, and the pigs feed you—
Dearly beloved, is this not true?

Again, on page 94, we find a poem (recited by a seven-year-old), which skirts the indelicate by a process of suggesting a rhyme which fails to materialize: "Up in the mountains,/Lying on the grass,/I saw a Chinaman/Sliding on his/Ask no questions," and so on. As a senior at Midland School at Los Olivos, California, in 1939-40, this author well recollects a similar ditty, brought back by one of the boys from Pasadena. In this case, of course, the innocence noted by the Opies amongst children was noticeably lacking!

There was a young lady
Who walked like a duck;
You could tell by her actions
That she wanted to [pause]
Bring up her children, and teach them to knit.
One day in the horse barn,
While shovelling out [pause]
Hay to the horses, one horse was sick;
He had a big sore on the end of his [long pause]
Nose [sung *molto con brio*].¹

This was irreverently known as "The Midland Hymn," and was often sung by members of the senior class *in camera*, to a tune which I do not recall.

Lastly, in chapter 9 ("Nicknames and Epithets"), the Opies state, "Tapioca or sago is